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Chapter 11

Moving and mediating: a mobile view on sub-Saharan African migration towards Europe

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Abstract

Traditionally migration related research has focused on the beginning and ending sides of migration. The general emphasis has been on the decision making process before migrating (the pre-migration phase) as well as on migrant's adaptation and integration at the ending stage of migration. Paradoxically, migration as a process of moving has been understudied. This study on sub-Saharan African (sSA) migration towards Europe attempts to include *en route* dynamics in migration research by analysing the migration process (the act of moving) in the framework of the *Mobilities Paradigm* (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007). Within this paradigm, mobility (instead of only settlement) is perceived as integral to human lives which challenges social science to go beyond their sedentary viewpoints.

The study presented here is based on several fieldwork periods in which various "places of migration" in different countries (Senegal, Morocco, Turkey, Spain, Italy, and The Netherlands) are visited to interview sSA migrants. Hence the migration dynamics both out- and inside Europe are taken into account. In addition, several migrants have been "followed" for a longer period of time to gain longitudinal insights into the process of migrating. Hereby experimental methods, such as email conversations and messenger chats, are used.

This paper presents an analytical framework that interconnects the (im)mobility of migrants with five other sorts of mobility: mobility of third persons, flows of goods and money, imaginative travels, communications and virtual travels. Thereby it acknowledges the importance of social networks during the migration process. However, it argues against the deterministic and all-inclusiveness of conventional network theories. It seeks for more "mobile" explanations where "very new contacts" outside the existing social network as well as processes of dis-connecting play key roles in trajectories of individual migrants.

With the *interconnected mobilities lens* this paper attempts to analyse the changeability of migrant aspirations/destinations, the flexibility/dependency of migrants during their journeys and the dialectic relationship between mobility and immobility in the migration process.

Keywords: migrant trajectories, (im)mobility, non-linearity, interconnections

Introduction

“The diversity of paths, and the complexity of forms of migrations, have meant that it is now almost impossible to map movement with a series of arrows, on a flat two-dimensional representation of the world. There would be a greater number of arrows going in multiple directions, and also the time scale would have to be so contracted and irregular that the map would lose its objective of representing movement”.

(Papastergiadis, 2000: 23-24).

This quote of Papastergiadis pictures the complexity, or in his terminology the turbulence, of the age of migration. Migration has become highly multidirectional and multi-causal. Thereby, the turbulent character of globalisation decouples migration from historical and structuralistic paths and stresses the importance of post-Fordist productions, flexibilities of labour, expansion of transport means and cultural dimensions concerning the translocal interconnections and “*ethnoscape*” of people in the world (Appadurai, 1996). Consequently, African migration must not merely be analysed in terms of the traditional push factors such as economic deprivation and political instability. Although they profoundly shape the context in which migration occurs, people’s “*imagined worlds*” and cultural connections by different media grow are also important factors that explain migration (cf. Gebrewold, 2007; Ros et al., 2007; Schapendonk and van Moppes, 2007). Moreover, by focusing on African migration, it is important to take into account the central position of mobility on the African continent. Extra-continental migration from Africa is therefore rather a continuation and intensification of mobile lifestyles than it denotes an entirely new phenomenon (De Bruijn et al., 2001; Bakewell and de Haas, 2007).

However, the widespread existence of “*imagined worlds*” owing to intensified globalisation is not equivalent to an open world. For many people originating from the southern parts of the “global village”, globalisation means rather social closure

facilitated by “*immobility regimes*” (Turner, 2007) rigidly fortifying their borders or even shifting their borders towards the sending sides of migration. Altogether, mobility becomes one of the most important stratifying factors of the globalising world (Bauman, 1998, 2004; Cresswell, 2006).

This combination of openness of globalisation and the closing of socio-political borders is important to contextualise today’s migration from sub-Saharan Africa towards Europe. People’s “*imagined worlds*” create high aspirations to travel abroad, while many people are not capable to realise this aspirations because of a combination of strict visa regimes and the lack of financial resources. This leads to frustrations regarding involuntary immobility which is, at the end, an important explanatory factor why people enter the EU unauthorised (Carling, 2002). Many migrants undertake fragmented and risky journeys. A considerable group of sub-Saharans is nowadays living under vulnerable conditions near the European border, awaiting the moment to enter their “Eldorado” (Zoomers, 2006). Some others are discouraged to move further northwards by intensified border controls by countries such as Algeria and Morocco. This includes the confinements of “unwanted migrants” in closed camps outside the EU, which has turned into a permanent form of Agamben’s “state of exception” in which non-citizens are subjected to extrajudicial acts of the state (Agamben, 2005; Papadopoulos et al., 2008).

These fragmented migrations raise many questions for human rights organisations, policy makers and academics. What I abstracted from these journeys is the analytical notion that migration is often *not* a simple transition from a place of origin to a destination (Collyer, 2007); it is not a matter of a *dis*-placement, one leaving the place of origin, to *re*-placement, one settling in a destination, but a process-like undertaking with its own dynamics. These migration processes of African migrants with all their restrictions, challenges, opportunities and dreams form the immediate cause to raise me a single question: What is the role of the journey in migration?

In line with this question, this contribution aims to understand the dynamics of migration trajectories by analysing migrant's aspiration, the role of (social) networks and migrant's im/mobility during the migration process. Special reference is made to the use of ICTs in this respect. The contribution does not merely take into account these fragmented migratory processes in so-called transit countries such as Morocco and Turkey. Although a substantial share of the data presented here is collected in these "transit areas", this paper discusses also the dynamics of trajectories bypassing the African-EU borderlands. The subsequent section outlines the main theoretical and methodological consideration of the study and presents the so-called interconnected (im)mobilities lens; a guideline to grasp migration trajectories. The next section discusses three migration trajectories with the help of this lens. Subsequently, the last section provides some reflections on the importance of ICTs in the process of moving. This contribution ends with some overall conclusions.

A mobile view on migration

Migration-related research has traditionally been conducted on the beginning and ending sides of migration. In the pre-migration phase, the decision-making process of migrants has been investigated intensively. At the ending side (the post-migration phase), the impact of migration on the host and sending societies has also been a regular topic of research. Paradoxically, migration as a process of moving has not much been studied in great depth. It has predominantly been analysed from a sedentary perspective: it has been seen as a matter of *uprooting/departure* and *regrounding/integration*. Thus, the profound critique on social science also counts for migration studies; we have investigated the *roots* rather than *routes* (Clifford, 1997). Or as Du Toit (1990: 308) stated: "[M]ore attention should be given to the "journey" than to the "origin" or "destination" because people who move may not know exactly where they are moving to, nor do they necessarily remain there, once they reached this

destination the migrant may explore better opportunities, may move on to a new situation, or may return to the point of departure. Migration is not an act but a process”.

This research follows Du Toit's suggestion by examining migration journeys of African migrants towards Europe. It expressly takes the trajectory as a unit of analysis. Hence mobility is put central to this research, instead of rootedness and rupture. This mobile view has profound consequences for migration as an analytical object. As it is indirectly noted by Du Toit, the focus on migration journeys puts the beginning and ending sides, departure-arrival, into perspective. It complicates departures by stating that there can be more than only one moment and place of departure. At the same time, it challenges the finiteness of arrivals since a destination can be transformed in nothing more than another place of departure. Such dynamic view suits better the turbulent character of contemporary migration, as Papastergiadis notes (2000: 4): “[I]t is increasingly evident that contemporary migration has no single origin and no simple end”. A mobile perspective opens up migration; there is no such thing as *permanent* settlement since migration encompasses more than a uni-linear movement between two places and there is always a possibility of further movement (Akin Aina, 1995; Skeldon, 1997).

The interconnected (im)mobilities lens

This mobile view links up with the recently emerged mobilities debate. This debate is predominantly based on the launch of *The New Mobilities Paradigm* (Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry, 2007) putting mobility central to social science without falling into post-modern pitfalls of everything flows and everything is liquid (Bauman, 2000). The main argument of this paradigm is that there exists some relationality between different mobilities as well as between mobilities and (relative) immobilities.¹ One mobility seems to always involve other mobilities in terms of facilitation and production (Adey, 2010). A business meeting is mostly facilitated by earlier meetings or communications as well as

¹ Where some authors in the mobilities discussion approach immobilities as 'moorings' meaning that mobilities indeed need *fixed* havens to depart from (Urry, 2007), others persist a more profound mobile approach by stating that nothing is absolute immobile but only relative immobile in relation to something else. In the latter sense, process rules and space is never still (Adey, 2006; Thrift, 2004).

by objects people move with (e.g. the car, phone, agendas). Furthermore, the mobility of one person, for instance the mobility of a pop-star to a concert hall, may produce the mobility of many others (his/her fans) to the same place.

However, there is no substantial increase of all these mobilities without the presence of (relative) immobilities and permanencies (Urry, 2000, 2007). To put it in metaphors: the mobile telephone needs its masts and the airplane needs its airports in order to be mobile. At the same time, some mobilities produce relative fixities. For a pedestrian, crossing a highway is close to impossible because of other mobilities. In the case of African migration, the facilitation of movement for one (the EU-citizen), means the immobilisation of the other (African would-be migrant). Thus, mobilities involve politics and meaning (Cresswell, 2006). In other words, not everyone is mobile in the same way and mobility might mean different things to different people in different settings (Cresswell, 2006; Adey, 2006; Urry, 2007).

The notion of relationality inspires me to analyse migrant's process of moving with the help of other mobilities. This results in the so-called *interconnected mobilities lens*. This lens approaches the trajectory not as an isolated straight corridor in the hands of a rational agent, but as an open process influenced by externalities. The following mobilities are believed to influence migrant's movements.²

- The corporeal mobility of third persons: This is intrinsically related to the importance of social networks in migration processes. It is widely agreed that social contacts ease migration processes in terms of financial and psychological costs. However, as it is explained below, the mobility of people not belonging to the social network might also matter.
- The mobility of objects and money: This includes consumer goods, (false) passports and money from family members.

² These mobilities are based on the different existing types of mobility outlined by Urry (2007) and are specified here to migration trajectories.

- Imaginative travel: Daydreaming and imaginaries might influence migration processes in a profound way, both at home and during the migration process.
- Virtual travel: With the help of the internet, television or other media, migrants access fresh information or create new aspirations.
- Communicative travel: Especially in case of overland trajectories, migrants are highly dependent on trustworthy and fresh information for their own security as well as for the continuation of their journeys (Schapendonk and van Moppes, 2007). Thereby migrant's use of ICTs is increasingly important which strengthens their flexibility on the road.

The best metaphor to understand this lens is the "road movie". A road movie often takes the perspective of one particular person. However, it does not only take into account the acts and routes of this person, but also their connection with other peoples and objects, their dreams and unexpected interventions during the process of moving. As a result, migration journeys are not perceived as processes entirely in the hands of a (rational) agent; the unit of analysis is not the individual migrant. Rather I focus on the *trajectory* where all above aspects might be present in hybrid forms. Trajectories are very much about synchronisation and contingent interactions with other movements and other people's trajectories. Trajectories are also very much about sequences of events. But trajectories are not only about what is really *present* or *met* on the road. Proximity and physical presence are not the only factors affecting the trajectory. This lens of connections and mobilities suggests that migrant's movements can be directed by the very distant and (assumably) absent while the geographically near may not have any influence at all; the world is rather folded (Bingham and Thrift, 2000; Thrift, 2004). After all, new and possible distant connections may result in new directions.³

³ This focus on interconnections and the perception that migrations are influenced by series of events have great overlapping with migration system approaches (cf. Fawcett, 1989). However, contrary to this set of migration theory, I am not so interested in the emergence of migration systems, but rather how these processes affect migration projects of individuals.

Although the lens links other mobilities to the migrant's process of moving, it does not assume a world in which migrants move to any place they desire. It takes into account block roads, bordering practices and migrant's experiences of immobility. Inspired by the mobilities paradigm it seeks for a dialectical understanding of movement and relative fixity.

Methods and fieldwork

The findings presented here are based on migration "stories" (migrant's history as well as future prospects). These migration stories are collected by means of in-depth interviews with sub-Saharan African migrants in several countries, out- and inside the EU. These countries are: Senegal, Morocco, Turkey, Spain and The Netherlands. Although many researchers would analyse African migrants in The Netherlands or Spain as being in their ending stage of migration, I do not have such presumptions beforehand since I approach migration as an open ended phenomenon.

Besides the multiplicity of research locations, there is another factor that has to be outlined here. Namely, a longitudinal element is included in the research in order to gain more insights into the actual evolution of migration trajectories. The longitudinal element consists of two aspects. Firstly, I visited respondents more than once. These repeated visits could be in the same location with a relatively long intervening period. More interestingly, I was able to visit a limited number of migrants that have reached Europe in the meantime. Secondly, the longitudinal element of my data collection consists of numerous telephone calls, email conversations and messenger chats. Thus, it has not only a multi-local but also a *translocal* character (Marcus, 1995; Crang, 2005). This combination of methods enabled me to follow specific migrant trajectories at a distance and provided me more information about migrant's everyday life, their (im)mobility and how migration projects evolve over time.

Some last comments must be made regarding the background of the respondents. There is a strong gender bias in my research since only 20 of my approximately 90 respondents were women. Especially in the transit areas of Turkey and Morocco it was difficult to approach women for interviews. Another important remark is that, in line with other migration researchers (e.g. Papadopoulou 2005, 2008), I follow the notion of mixed migration indicating that the reasons to migrate are often overlapping. Particularly in the context of African migration, underdevelopment, weak governance, conflicts, and environmental degradation are interlinked. For this reason, there is no distinction made beforehand between the two conventional categories; economic migrant and political refugee. Although, it is acknowledged that, in many cases, fleeing from a violent conflict all at once has different implications for the migration trajectory in terms of preparation/organisation of the journey. This does not per definition mean that the trajectory is predominantly characterised by this first movement. The outline of the findings below will pay more attention to this issue.

Migration trajectories

In this section the findings of the study are analysed with the help of the interconnected mobilities lens. By paying special attention to connections and mobilities, it is aimed to understand better three different aspects of the trajectory:

- migrant's aspirations
- the importance of networks and "collectives"
- migrant's corporeal (im)mobility

The findings are illustrated by three different cases. Although it must be emphasised that every migration story stands on its own, it is attempted to extent the analytical value of these three cases by the inclusion of similar insights from other migration histories and in-depth interviews with migrants.

The zigzag route

Eric is a Nigerian man in his late 20s. I met him for the first time in Rabat (Morocco), January 2008. There he told me how he was inspired to migrate to Europe by Nigerian football players in the European leagues. He kept the European dream alive for several years and by working as a butcher he was able to save some money to realise this aspiration. In 2006 he created, together with four friends of his hometown, the concrete plan of going to Europe via Morocco from where they could reach Spain. Eric commented that he had not a final destination in mind, but was migrating to “*Europe*”. The “*Nigerian crew*” arranged transport in stages to respectively Kano (Nigeria), Zinder, Agadez (Niger), Tamanrasset, Ghandana and Maghnia (Algeria), Oujda and Rabat (Morocco). At the moment I met Eric he stayed closely together with his friend Jonathan, from his hometown, the other two friends stayed in Oujda. According to Eric the four friends separated because “*everybody has its own plan*”. At the time I met Eric and Jonathan in Morocco they resided there for a period of one year and three months. The reason for this immobility was the fact that they were not able to finance the last jump to Europe. However, for some months Eric found work in Rabat by a Moroccan man who lived most of the time in Greece (re-migrant). This man supported Eric financially and gave him shelter. After a while, as Eric explained, he told his “*boss*” about his plan to go to Europe. Since passing to Spain became extremely difficult because of the increased surveillances of the Spanish border areas, he changed his original plan of going to Spain by the plan of transferring to Europe via Libya. In Libya he worked in the construction sector where he did not receive any money for the hard work but, after some weeks, he obtained a ticket for one of those fragile boats departing for Europe. Together with approximately 40 other migrants he managed to reach Lampedusa. As he explained the security guards treated them well, but he was still afraid that they would take his sim-card from him. That is why he hid the card between his toes. From Lampedusa he got transferred to a migrant camp on the Italian mainland (Crotone). During his stay in Tripoli (Libya) and in the Italian camp he

received all sorts of information about Italy. There he learned for instance that many Africans lived in Firenze. So what he did after he "escaped" from the camp, was buying a train ticket to Firenze. There he lived for around 6 days as a wanderer around the central train station, until the moment he got in contact with a compatriot living in Prato (a satellite city of Firenze). This man brought Eric to Prato and, for the moment, he is living there with two Nigerians in a rental house. He earns his money as a street vendor; he is selling imported housekeeping products that he buys from Chinese bulk supermarkets. When I asked Eric about his good friend Jonathan he was telling me that Jonathan is still "*suffering in Morocco*" and when Jonathan called Eric, he was always asking for support. Eric found the situation frustrating since he has repeatedly tried to explain his difficult situation. Eric now possesses two mobile phones, one for the numerous phone calls from Italy, one for his family and friends in Nigeria and his "brothers" in Morocco and Libya.

Aspirations

This trajectory shows that migration aspirations can be very abstract and hence changeable. It is important to note that this is rather the rule than the exception for these sub-Saharan African stepwise migrants residing in the European border zone (Collyer, 2007; Papadopoulou, 2008). "Europe", "Schengen", "The West", are often the desired destinations, instead of "Paris", "Brescia", or "my family in Madrid". In many cases no geographical indication is given at all. In this context "*finding a safe place to live in*" or "*finding a place where I can live a normal life*" are often described as the destination. Consequently, migration destinations are moving targets; if a place/country of residence does not meet the expectations/aspirations of a specific migrant, he/she will do their best effort to leave again. The abstract migration goals contribute to migrant's flexibility during their journeys.

Migration networks and collectives

Eric's case indicates that migrants may build up collectives during the migration process. These collectives might exist from the very start of the migration process, as in the example above, or they might only be created for a specific period of the journey (e.g. the crossing of the Sahara desert or during the temporary stay in one of the informal migrant camps).⁴ Brachet (2005) characterises these collectives as a specific form of territoriality that is based on a sense of otherness vis-à-vis the environment they cross. Collyer (2006) points at the protective role of the migrant collectives as he describes them as important survival strategies for migrants reducing risk of individuals and creating mutual solidarity among migrants. However, this example shows that these collectives can be quite fragile since each migrant has its own personal strategy. Moreover, the case explicitly indicates the difference between bonding and bridging capital. Although, Eric and Jonathan were close friends (bonding capital) they were unable to help each other "to get ahead". At the same time it becomes clear that Eric's connections with very new bridging contacts (the Moroccan re-migrant, the friendly helping hand at the Firenze train station) was very helpful and even decisive for the fact he currently resides in Prato.

This example also strongly points at the importance of translocal communications and particularly the mobile phone. Eric was afraid to lose his contacts in times of his confinement in Lampedusa. This is not unusual, because mobile phones leave traces on sim-cards that might lead security agents towards his contacts in Libya and beyond.⁵ And in the worst case this means repatriation. In a way, it is not surprising that the first asset border guards take from migrants is their mobile phones, as a Moroccan NGO representative stated: *"then they take them out of the network"* meaning that migrants are rather impotent without the connection to their contacts.

⁴ For a comprehensive discussion on migration collectives see Collyer (2007) and Schapendonk (2009).

⁵ In a discussion session during the 3rd European Conference on Africa studies (Leipzig, 2009) similar remarks were made concerning the asylum procedures of asylum seekers in Denmark. As it was explained, migrant's mobile phones are used by government agencies to trace their routes and know their first EU country they have entered in order to repatriate them.

Corporeal (im)mobility

It is repeatedly argued that *being in transit* might not be that transitory for the migrant experiencing it (cf. İçduygu and Yüксеker, 2008; Bensaad, 2007). Eric had a waiting period in Morocco of approximately one and a half years. Moreover, his detainment in Italy shows that, in case of irregular journeys, there is an inherent tension between movement and non-movement. Where containment is often a matter of force, the same may count for movement as Eric's replacement to Southern Italy indicates. Migrants that arrive at one of the European "islands" (e.g. Lampedusa, the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla or the Canary Islands) are sent to the mainland with a highly distributive character. This, of course, has a profound impact on the evolution of migration trajectories. A related aspect is the fact that a number of migrants is misled by their smugglers. While a ticket to "Europe" is promised, they end up just outside this political entity (van Liempt, 2007). This was the case for some of my respondents in Istanbul and Morocco. Eric's trajectory shows that, where generally most attention is paid to smugglers and their networks to explain migrant's mobility, the impact of authority interventions (not only immobilising migrants) must not be overlooked.

The reactive plan

Mariama is a Mauritanian woman of age 26. As a teenager she always had the dream to go to the university but because of the political turn in Mauritania during the 1990s, this dream was disturbed radically. Her father got arrested for his involvement in the military coup and the quality of life of the family deteriorated. A combination of frustration of being "*blocked*" in her personal development and a feeling of responsibility as a firstborn child towards her family made her think to migrate to Europe. Through her father she came in contact with a Frenchman who was working for *Médecins sans Frontières*. This man helped her with all the procedures to go to the Canary Islands. She arrived in name of the organisation. Mariama stayed in Las Palmas for only three months because it was a "*too big change for a sixteen year old*

girl". Her emotional instability made her go back to Mauritania where she subsequently applied for a study at the university. Unfortunately, she was rejected and even penalised by the government with a house arrest. In this time of immobility she became resolute to move out of the country (*"I was very angry at my country"*) and in the meantime she got in contact with somebody working for the UNHCR. After a while, she asked him whether she could work as a babysitter for the family and told this man the entire story. The man from the UNHCR was only for three months in the country and left to live in T., in France. Mariama asked him whether she could work for them in Europe as well. Finally, he agreed and Mariama was able to travel to France. After three months in France she convinced herself to make a move out of this domestic work as she stated: *"I started to think, this is not it! I always aimed for independency and now I am working as a housekeeper?"* She told her boss that she decided to leave the house and a serious argument followed. Afterwards she called her mother desperately with the question whether she knew someone who could help her that lives *"anywhere in Europe"* and her mother gave her just one phone number of a Pulaar man living in Amsterdam. The same day, she called this man, and he instructed her to go to Brussels where a Pulaar man from Senegal could pick her up. He also sent her 100 guilders by regular mail. With the money she went to Paris. But the problem was that her former boss kept her travel documents, so she became undocumented. After a *"nerve-racking"* train transfer at *Gare du Nord*, she managed to go to Brussels. There the Senegalese man picked her up. As she commented she was very nervous *"because my family did not even know this man"*. But it turned out to be *"a very good man"*. Mariama stayed in Brussels for a week and after that she was picked up by the Mauritanian man from Amsterdam. This man told her that she could not stay at his place forever because *"The Netherlands is not like Mauritania, you cannot arrange things only with the right contacts and money"* and advised her to apply for asylum. After a month she followed his advice and went to the police. During the asylum procedure she was sent to different places. As she commented she was *"locked in the*

asylum system” meaning that people decided for her where to go to. After a while, Mariama came to know that there was a considerable group of Mauritians living in Nijmegen. She first went there for a weekend *“just to check out the place”* and came in contact with a Mauritanian man who helped her with finding a good living place. She finally got her papers and is living in Nijmegen for 8 years now. As she explained, she intends to stay there for a while since she *“faced enough challenges”* and all she needs is a *“place to rest”*. She visited her family in Mauritania in 2006 and she made plans to visit them again next year.

Aspirations/destinations

Mariama’s story is not shaped by a certain place or country she was heading to and has rather a trial-and-error character. Her first time abroad [in Spain] was disappointing, but once she returned, her situation at home frustrated her even more. The immobilisation during her house arrest made the urge to migrate more prominent in her life. The fact that she ended up in the Netherlands had nothing to do with a certain dream attached to that country. In fact, her aspiration is probably best formulated as a combination of a thorough resistance towards her country of birth and a wish for personal development. That made her destination, after she left T., rather open and abstract.

Migration networks and collectives

Mariama’s first move to Europe is a perfect example of how weak ties may help people to get ahead in their migration process (Granovetter, 1973). The contact of her father helped her to move to the Canary Islands. However, her subsequent movements are more complex. She met the UNHCR staff member on her own and this new contact had profound consequences for her future migration process. It enabled her to go to T., but the argument and frictions between her and her boss made her also go out of T. The latter was made possible by a process of dis-connecting; she totally lost contact with the family after she had left them. Her subsequent movement to Brussels is partly

determined by her Pulaar ethnicity connecting her via the contact in Amsterdam to this particular man in Brussels.⁶ Although she never met both men before, the common ethnicity contributed to a high solidarity which eases her journey. In strange situations people search for people with a similar background; in an African context this often comes back to ethnic identity. This is further illustrated by the presence of a considerable Mauritanian community in Nijmegen which is an important reason why she went to that place. These networks do not necessarily exist of people that know each other for certain reasons. As this example shows, Mariama did not meet both men that helped her to get ahead. In that sense these ethnic networks are much more fluid than the widely used social networks of migrants comprehending people that are directly or indirectly linked to the migrant.

What this case also illustrates is that the facilitation of migration is not always linked to criminal businesses but may involve friendly helping hands as well.

Corporeal (im)mobility

This example indicates that migration is not about moving only forwards. Mariama went to Spain, back to Mauritania and after that, she migrated to France and later to the Netherlands. It also shows that the stepwise character of migration might continue within the EU and thereby this case does not stand on its own. African migrants frequently continue migrating within the EU. This is the case for recently arrived migrants in Spain or Greece, but also for assumingly more settled communities like the Congolese community in the Netherlands. During the interviews in the Netherlands it is repeatedly argued that Congolese migrants move to other countries after they have gained residence permits or Dutch citizenship. The most important reasons are family reunification (Belgium, for instance has less strict rules for Congolese families), personal development and the changing political environment in the country. Similar examples are Danish Somalis moving to the UK after they have gained citizenship in

⁶ Similar findings are outlined in the case of Senegalese Wolof networks (cf. Riccio, 2001).

Denmark (Bang Nielsen, 2004) and the mobility of Senegalese migrants in Italy (Schuster, 2005).

In times Mariama was confronted with forced immobility (house arrest), she felt the urge to move out the most. The same counts for her situation in T. In a way she was locked up by the prospect of being a housemate for years which made her decide to move again. Contrastingly, she experienced relative immobility (being “locked in the asylum system”) in times she was geographically mobilised because she was transferred to different places in a rather short period of time. Here, the relationality between mobility and immobility becomes clear. The fact that she found a resting place (denoting relative immobility) from where she can visit her origin country (her renewed mobility) underlines this relationality.

This example also shows how Mariama’s migration is affected by different sorts of mobility. The mobility of third persons (the UNHCR representative moving to T., the Mauritanian man picking her up in Brussels), communication (telephone call with her mother), the mobility of money (the 100 guilders she received from her contact in Amsterdam).

In search for the love connection

Patrick, a young man from Cameroon, was invited with five other guys for a trial period at a Turkish football club in Antalya. As he commented: *“A man from this club saw me playing in Cameroon and he arranged everything for me, he bought an airplane ticket and promised me a contract and a great future”*. From this Cameroonian group, Patrick was the only one who managed to get a contract, two of his compatriots went home the others stayed for the next season to try their luck again, but Patrick did not know what happened with these persons afterwards. After his club downgraded, the club broke Patrick’s contract and Patrick went to Istanbul, where he stayed for almost 2 years. At that time he entered Istanbul, he was not thinking of going to Europe since he was

convinced to find a suitable club in Istanbul; *“Europe was just not in my reach”*. However, Patrick did not achieve this social success and got frustrated about his situation. *“In that period, you try everything, I even applied for a club in Tunis and I was thinking of going to Moldova...I was searching for different places to go to. So I spent hours on the Internet searching for a solution and in that time I also met my wife on the web, I spent many hours chatting with her on the internet...it just created love, but the problem was that she lived in Holland”*. After some period of time, Patrick’s future wife came over to Istanbul regularly and the “love connection” was solidified and in five months later they were married in Istanbul. The marriage allowed Patrick to come to the Netherlands. About this country he was saying: *“I never thought of going there, it just never crossed my mind”*. The procedure to move to the Netherlands was highly frustrating for Patrick. *“First you need this paper, then you need a birthday paper, then you need a health declaration and so on...it takes a lot of time. You have to be very patient, but it was too complicated, too frustrating”*. Patrick is now living together with his wife in the South of the Netherlands and took some language classes to learn the Dutch language and plays football as an amateur. About his current situation he told me: *“Maybe I go back to Turkey one day, for me it was not a bad country...Football players and migrants are somehow the same, they have to be flexible, if there is a good place to stay, they stay, but if they think they can have more success elsewhere they would change places again”*.

Aspirations/destinations

The trajectory of Patrick shows that Europe might be not the primary destinations for African migrants at the moment they leave their countries of origin. In fact, we may argue that “Europe” as a destination emerged more or less spontaneously after his situation in Turkey deteriorated. Thereby “Europe” was not the only place he was thinking of to go to; he had multiple orientations (Grillo, 2007). This underlines that migrant’s situation in host countries is rather changeable and hence migrant’s

aspirations are changeable too. Moreover, the multiplicity of orientations makes migration not a clear-cut project but a project with shifting destinations and multiple opportunities as well as restrictions. As a Nigerian man stated in Istanbul: *“When one door is closed, another will be opened”*. This, once more, implies that migration destinations are rather flexible than fixed; as Patrick’s final comments indicate, migration is indeed open ended.

Migration networks and collectives

Patrick’s trajectory again outlines the importance of “very new ties” in the migration process; the football manager and his wife did not belong to their social networks beforehand. Both contacts turn out to be the most important facilitators of his movements. In the case of his future wife, we might state that very new ties may solidify in bonding contacts. It is also important to take into account the fact that his contract was broken by the club in Antalya. This disconnection made him decide to go to Istanbul.

Corporeal (im)mobility

This example illustrates that migration is not merely about corporeal movement. Patrick’s migration to the Netherlands, of course, cannot be explained without taking into account his movement to Istanbul. However, this corporeal migration is not the only mobility that matters in his trajectory. Patrick’s virtual travel on the web is a good example of possible migration without being physically on the move. His stagnation in terms of social mobility is an important reason for his search on the Internet. Moreover, one may argue that the institutional embedding in the Dutch society by his marriage, is an important reason for Patrick’s migration to the Netherlands. Probably, without this sort of (institutional) fixity, Patrick was not able to move in this direction.

ICTs, blessing and curse for migrants on the road

In this contribution, the world is considered as folded. This especially becomes clear from the perspective of the trajectory. An African migrant living in Morocco might not have any contact with the physically close (e.g. the local population), while the “far away” (contacts in Europe or elsewhere) might have a profound influence on the migration process. The presence of ICTs facilitates this folded character of the world. All migrants I spoke to in the “transit spaces” had one or more mobile phones. Their social networks could be traced back to the very tiny sim-cards in their phones. These phones create “a sense of place” in the process of movement; family and close friends are contacted by the phone and migrants can be reached by the same people; it creates a “*mobile address*”, as one Congolese woman in Rabat stated. These communication means are also important in terms of the flexible strategies of migrants in the process of moving. As it is stated above, new connections are highly important for new directions, and these new contacts can easily be stored/connected with the phone as well as new information can be searched and checked instantly.

The same counts for the Internet. In some cases migrants stated to be connected to their families by the means of email or chat conversations. However, Internet seems to be more important for the search of new information, new entry points and new connections. This is underlined by Patrick’s case above; indeed his virtual was a condition for his physical travel; a new migration direction was found by his virtual travel. ICTs make information circulating more broadly, both at home and along the journey. This notion can be expanded by the mushrooming of money transfer agencies along important migration routes facilitating individual migratory movements. Besides the increasing flexibility of migrants, all these technologies make the coordination of migration also easier which may imply a professionalization of migration networks.

However, ICTs are not only friendly to the ones with the aspiration to reach Europe. First and foremost, border practices are innovated by new communication

technologies; ICTs and new technologies tighten borders.⁷ Moreover, ICTs used by migrants leave traces. It is reported that authorities use migrant's phones to identify routes, departure areas or origins with the aim of repatriation.⁸

Finally, since mobile phones can be seen as *the* node of a social network, migrants may easily fall out of networks or lose social ties in case they lose their phones.⁹ This might not be the case for migrant's family and friends since people carry their contact details in their heads, but this is certainly the case for those weak and/or new ties that are considered here as vital to the continuation of migration processes.

Conclusion

The mobilities perspective presented in this paper successfully debunks one of the long-lasting migration myths. This myth, as outlined and already refuted by Skeldon (1997), implies that migration is generally seen as a simple move from an origin to a destination. The mobilities lens shows how migration, in fact, consists of a complex sequence of movements and often involves more than one destination. The fact that migration aspirations of African migrants are commonly abstract and involve "moving targets", contributes to this dynamic character of migration. In that sense the term "migrant horizons" is appropriate here. Horizons, as Fortier and Lewis (2006) argue, contain dreams, desires, anxieties and are about infinity.

It is argued here that in this era of increased globalisation and closed borders many migrants are highly flexible. Their flexibility is linked to, among others, the rather abstract migration goals, the use of modern communication means and the few formal and informal social obligations migrants have during their journeys. A particular group of sub-Saharan African migrants heading North, moves without the co-presence of a

⁷ One example is the Spanish SIVE system (Carling, 2007).

⁸ This issue was raised during an interview with the NGO APDHA (Oujda, 2008). In a discussion session during the 3rd European Conference on Africa studies (Leipzig, 2009) similar remarks were made concerning the asylum procedures of asylum seekers in Denmark.

⁹ Many respondents stated to be robbed, at least once, from their phones, or that an authority agent claimed the phone and never gave it back.

family member. These migrants dis-connect as easily as they connect with people they meet “on the road”. However, flexibility alone does not bring migrants very far since they are highly dependent on third persons for specific parts of the journey or to find work to finance a next step of the journey. This again implies that migrants have to connect and dis-connect with “not-so-personal-contacts”. Altogether, we can conclude that this dependency-flexibility and disconnecting-connecting dialectics are for many migrants moving in the age of turbulent migration inherent elements of their migration processes, especially for those who are not granted access to certain desired destinations.

Similarly, as it is outlined in the empirical examples, the migration process does not only contain movement. Many people experience relative immobility during specific parts of their trajectory. Sometimes this immobility is coerced by border practices or asylum procedures, and sometimes migrants remain relatively immobile by choice. In this contribution, mobility and immobility are considered as inherently related to each other. One is able to travel to their homeland in case one has found a resting place (see Mariama’s case). This exemplifies a relationality between travel and dwelling. Moreover, Eric experienced immobilisation during his confinement in the Italian reception camp, but was not isolated from vital information (communicative mobility) that influenced the continuation of his journey. Here standing still, does not mean non-migration. Instead, immobility can be seen as a part of migratory movement as forgetting is part of memory.¹⁰

Since being immobile is not necessary without migration and migrating does not necessarily mean being mobile, the distinction between movement and non-movement becomes blur (Ahmed et al., 2003). This notion keeps us from deterministic conceptualisations of settlement; as if all migrants that are settled remain in that place

¹⁰ Here I would like to thank Dr. Noël Salazar for raising this issue in a session during the 3rd European Conference on African Studies in Leipzig, 2009.

forever, as well as it prevents us to romanticise and exaggerate mobility; as if migrants are always on the move. The migrant world of increased flexibility, mobility and ICT usage, presented here, does not implicate a world without rest; without settlement. It is argued, however, that settlement is never without movement and always open ended.

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